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ABSTRACT

There are many impediments to the development of political science as a true academic discipline in the Arab world. Each nation has its own ideological and political framework, and freedoms are determined within this framework. To operate outside this framework is considered an attack on the legality of the system and a possible threat to national security. Therefore, academic freedoms are limited and classroom instruction is a matter of delivering preplanned concepts. Objectionable professors and students are purged and information that is considered objectionable is not included when textbooks and journals are translated into Arabic. There is no separation of church and state in the Islamic world, so for a political scientist to discuss analytically the concepts of the Caliphate or such topics as nationalism, socialism, or Marxism is tantamount to heresy. Because Ph.D. programs are not well developed, graduates of the universities must go abroad for further study. When they return to teach, they bring with them the teaching methods, textbooks, and philosophical and ideological orientations of those countries in which they studied. This diversity creates problems as professors and administrators disagree on curricula, subject content, examinations, treatment of students, and research methods. The Arabic language is required for instruction but there is a shortage of textbooks and reference materials in Arabic. The faculty in the Arab world sense these problems and are attempting to resolve them.
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Teaching Political Science

In the Arab World

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Teaching Political Science in the Arab World

I was fortunate to have had two opportunities to teach political science in the Arab Middle East. At two universities, I taught, conducted research, and participated in the area of departmental decision making.

I spent academic 1975 - 1976 at the University of Benghazi in Libya teaching political science subjects. I was in addition involved in decision making at the university, faculty, and department levels. During the year I was there, the university's name was changed to Garyunis University. I also taught political science subjects at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. That was in the spring of 1985.

I went to Benghazi at the invitation of the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Commerce at Garyunis University, who was one of our Ph.D. graduates at Oklahoma State University. In the fall of 1984, I visited King Saud University during a lecture tour sponsored by the United States Information Agency (USIA). I visited several countries on that tour. As an AmPart, American participant, I called on members of the Department of Political Science at King Saud University and I was invited to spend a semester there. I gladly accepted the offer.

This, I must admit, was not my first experience with

political science in the Arab world. I attended the American University in Beirut from 1936 - 1940 as a political science student, but AUB has always been a different animal. As an institution of higher learning it followed, given the environment it operated within, as closely as it felt possible the American system. This is why any variations from the American system were minimal.

Historical Background:

The Arab Middle East is now dotted with universities. There is at least one university in every Arab state and many have several. The last to be added is the new university in Bahrain. The first modern style university to be established in the Arab world was the American University in Beirut, AUB, established in 1866 by American missionaries who then called it the Syrian Protestant College. The name was later changed when the university ended its religious affiliation. The establishment of AUB prompted the Jesuits to open, a year later, their own university in East Beirut and named it the St. Joseph University. The missionary competition being so strong in those days, it is reported that when Daniel Bliss opened the Syrian Protestant College he boasted of having established two new colleges. When it was pointed out to him that he had only opened the Syrian Protestant College, his reply was: "Next year we will also have a Jesuit University."

University development slowed down after that. In fact, one had to wait until 1908, the year Cairo University in

Egypt was established. This did not mean that in those days higher education had no recruits in the Arab East apart from those who went to either the American University in Beirut or the St. Joseph University. Until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, Arabs seeking higher education went to the Istanbul colleges or worked for a religious oriented degree in such great traditional institutions of learning like the great Al Azhar in Cairo.

While the American University in Beirut ushered to the Arab world the American university system, the St. Joseph University ushered in the French system. On the other hand, Cairo University, which for a time was called King Fuad I University ushered in basically the British system.

With the end of Ottoman rule, the Arab Middle East found itself divided between French and British occupied regions, while Libya sank deeper under Italian rule. Each of the occupying powers went ahead and introduced a series of laws intended to accord recognition exclusively to the degrees of the occupying powers. The AUB degrees were as a result not accredited in all those regions except that practically all of them did accredit the medical degree bestowed by AUB, and some accredited other AUB degrees but strictly in the area of the teaching professions.

Egypt's special position as the most populous Arab country, its leadership role, and the fact that Egypt had for an extended period of time provided the largest number of

Arabs with higher education degrees, propelled Egypt into a position of prominence in the fields of higher education throughout the rest of the Arab world. Professors and higher education administrators became an "export commodity," and Egypt "exported" them to every country in the Arab world, either to build and administer the new universities or to provide the professorial cadres. They went to North Africa, the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Iraq, Jordan and Kuwait. Others went to teach in the high schools and even the grade schools. This situation persists to a lesser degree up to the present time. Now whenever a national from any of these states completes his advanced training abroad he returns to his country to replace an Egyptian professor or administrator. As an example, I was invited to teach in Libya by a former Libyan student who on completing his Ph.D. at Oklahoma State University, went back home, and replaced the long standing Egyptian Dean of his college.

During the period in question, Egypt embarked on an additional venture in the field of higher education. It opened branches of its universities in Beirut and the Sudan.

When Cairo University was established, Britain was still the political authority in Egypt, and it was decided that the university should for all practical purposes become an extension of London University, then already operating a system of external students. Cairo University thus started by providing instruction under the supervision of London

University. The final examinations were given by London University and supervised and graded by professors of that University. In return, graduates of Cairo University were granted acceptance at British Universities to pursue graduate degrees. It was natural under this arrangement to have the London University system adopted by Cairo University. Studying Political Science at London was part of the London School of Economics and Cairo University adopted the same system for its undergraduate degrees.

As to the graduate degrees, for one reason or another, political science under the umbrella of economics was not an accepted proposition, and looking for an academic base the law school provided that base. An interesting feature is that political science under the umbrella of economics followed a British curriculum, yet because Egypt had adopted French law not British law, the law school was under the influence of the French system. This meant that whenever students decided to do graduate work, they had to become oriented with the French system.

When Egypt began setting up new Universities in the Arab world, Egyptians naturally set up the new universities in their image, and set up the departments of political science within the faculties of Economics and Commerce. At Benghazi University, Political Science is part of the Faculty of Economics and Commerce, and the College of Administrative Sciences is the home base of political science

at King Saud University in Riyadh.

This explains the present setup in the Arab world and why the teaching of Political Science is influenced by the London School of Economics as later changed or developed by Cairo University to accomodate the French influence. What is more, the first line of professors at Cairo University were trained in England, but those with a legal background were trained in France. It was those same professors and their students who spread out throughout the Arab world to administer and teach political science.

This had a profound effect on teaching political science. The professors were British-French trained or trained in the British-French model, and the textbooks used were on the whole translations into the Arabic language from either the British or French academic literature.

As the American universities became more available to foreigners, and more Arab nationals came to study in the United States, a new crop of administrators and professors joined the staff of the Universities in the Arab world. Those new professors and administrators began to question the validity and orthodoxy of the British and French oriented curriculums and tried to change the system in favor of the American system, to the dismay of the British and French trained faculty. In both Libya and in Saudi Arabia, at faculty meetings, we argued and argued over the validity and orthodoxy of the British and French and the American systems.

In particular we argued over the semester system compared to the year course system, the need for more frequent testing, and the need for more student involvement instead of the prevailing system of large lecture sections. In particular we argued the merits of the new scientific methods incorporated in the American system compared to the philosophical-legalistic approach of the British and French systems. What intrigued me most was the continued reference in our discussions to the multiple choice examination system, which very few knew how to prepare and administer, and was always referred to as the American examination system.

There is a strong movement to adopt the American system in as far as course content, the semester system, the testing system, student-instructor involvement and the credit hour system. In Libya I spent a good deal of time explaining the course numbering system which needs to be developed if one is to accept the credit hour system. It was fascinating to see this simple system accepted as a great accomplishment.

The following discussion dealing with faculty, students and curricula is a collection of personal views arrived at during my association with the Arab universities of the Middle East. On several occasions I had the chance to discuss them with my Arab colleagues, but they still remain my own views, the product of personal study and observation.

1. The Political and social environment:

This refers to the bevy of pressures and impediments to the development of political science as a true academic discipline in the Arab world.

The present political systems of the Arab world can be divided into two broad categories, the totalitarian systems, and the incomplete democracies. The constitutions of the Arab world provide for all the basic individual freedoms, yet in every case the state has its own ideological and political framework and freedoms are channeled within this framework. To try and operate outside the set framework is treated as an attack on the legality of the system, and possibly a conspiracy to destroy the system thus a threat to national security. Political scientists who function within such a frame of reference have either to accept its precepts, or become passive political scientists. The other alternative is to carry the banner of revolt and face the consequences.

Academic freedoms are as a result limited, and classroom instruction relegates itself to the art of delivering pre-planned concepts. Active discussion sessions are strongly avoided and research as an academic pursuit is shunned.

In Libya one of my colleagues decided to author a book in Arabic as an introductory text in political science. He asked me to cooperate with him in writing the book, but I politely declined this honor. I explained that given the importance of the Green Book in Libya it would be futile to

try and study political science without the constraints of the book. My colleague did complete the book and published it. Since political parties are rediculed in the Green Book, it was a fatal mistake on his part to discuss political parties in his book. I understand that he nearly lost his university position over this "mistake".

While teaching in Saudi Arabia I discovered that one could discuss and criticize any political system in the world with the exception of the Saudi system. Every time a textbook was translated into Arabic for use by the Saudi university system, somehow any reference to Saudi Arabia was automatically removed from the text.

Over the years Arab universities have been purged to remove from active service the objectionable professors and students. This does not have to be repeated often as both faculty and students are aware of what happened in the past, and in such an atmosphere, prefer either a passive role or a secret active role.

One should not forget that practically all the universities of the Arab world are government institutions. Those universities operate on government authorized budgets and the government in return demands political orthodoxy. This gives the government the right to determine, if need be, the types of courses offered, and in particular insist on giving the political system an important place on the curriculum.

2. The religious environment:

The seventies saw in the Arab world the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, which its disciples prefer to call the "Islamic awakening." Regardless of the reasons for this awakening it is an existing phenomenon and cannot be overlooked.

It should be remembered that Islam teaches that it is both a religion and a state, that is there is no separation of church and state. The wall of separation we are so accustomed to in the United States does not exist and was never built in the Islamic world. One casualty of the Islamic awakening has been the political scientists. It is now an act tantamount to heresy to discuss analytically the concepts of the Caliphate or to broach such unacceptable subjects like nationalism, socialism or marxism. The only areas which are open to discussion are how to establish the Islamic state, the shura system in preference to the parliamentary system, and the Islamic banking system in preference to the interest oriented banking system. In this atmosphere, Islamic fundamentalists have targeted the state constitutions and forced certain changes. Islamic law was made the sole source of law, and moves to grant women their social and political rights are strongly criticized as they deem them contrary to their own interpretation of Islam. They have even called on governments to purge public and private libraries of all and any book which does not conform

to their principles.

On the university campuses Islamic fundamentalist students quickly targeted the political science faculty and either frightened them into an inactive or docile role or "reported" them to the authorities to force them out of the academic world.

This insistence on the religious in opposition to the secular character of the state has compounded the problems of religious minorities, and regionalism. These areas are off limits to discussion regardless of how important they are to national unity.

In Saudi Arabia I found there is an appreciable number of faculty and students who show their reservations over the workability of the shura and banking systems, and the fact that women are not allowed to drive cars. They point out that women have always ridden camels and that they see no difference between the camel of the past and the modern day car. Both are a means of communication, and the difference is limited to the availability of the system at a certain period in time.

3. The academic staff:

There is a growing need for additional academic staff to teach at the growing number of universities in the Arab world. Except for the Egyptian universities and some of the Beirut universities the Ph.D. programs are either not well

developed, or do not exist at all. This has forced many of the Arab universities to send their bright graduates abroad to pursue graduate training. While many of those students, and particularly those in the field of political science studied in the USA or are still studying there, others went to Britain, France, Germany, Italy and even the Soviet Union. On the completion of their training they returned home to teach and each one, influenced by the teaching methods he experienced, the textbooks he used, and the philosophical and ideological orientations of those countries, was quick to introduce these to his country and his students. One can only imagine how the political science departments of the nascent Arab universities faced this colossal problem of diversity.

Professors and administrators disagree on curriculums, subject content, exams, treatment of students, and research methods. I attended faculty meetings with those professors, and while here we try to stress the problems associated with faculty meetings, these problems are dwarfed by the problems associated with faculty meetings of the Arab universities. There the different philosophies of the American, British, and French systems must somehow be coordinated into a working system by faculty who had received such diverse training. This is compounded by the fact that the shortage of trained faculty, has resulted in a faculty amalgam of different nationalities committed to applying within the same

university the systems they trained under. The picture assumes a serious proportion when it is zoomed to cover the whole state, and the Arab world at large.

It is a well known fact that the legalistic system of teaching political science as exemplified by France is still the order of the day in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, and the Lebanese and St. Joseph Universities in Beirut.

Political economy seems to be the dominant feature of the Egyptian universities, and the Beirut Arab University (an Egyptian branch). As discussed earlier, this is the influence of London University and its School of Economics.

A third is the influence of administrative sciences on political science. This is apparent at the Jordanian universities, Kuwait University, Garyunis University of Libya, and the Saudi universities, although the recent trend is to separate the administrative science curriculum from the political science curriculum.

These divergent academic and political philosophies have produced differences in the teaching methods even within the same university, and the background and training of the specific instructor adds to the problem. We can clearly identify the following systems:

a) The European system which prescribes a set curriculum with no room for student choice of subject matter. Each course is taught over a full academic year and exams are given at the end of the year. This system still prevails in

North Africa and at the St. Joseph University in Beirut.

b) The American system which is based on offering a variety of courses within a political science curriculum, which provides for basic courses, electives and even minors offered by more than one university department. The semester system is used and more frequent examinations are given. The system uses the credit hour plan of study and a student could complete the degree requirements in less than four years if he wants to. The present trend in the Arab world is to adopt the basics of the American system.

I pointed out earlier that the academic background of the faculty determines the way they teach in the classroom. While many of them have adopted the American scientific analytical pragmatic method of teaching, which is based on the interrelationships of the political phenomena, which can be categorized and analyzed, many others still use the historical narrative approach, while others are sold on the study of legal documents.

As an example, I taught regional organizations in the spring of 1985 at King Saud University. The instructor who taught another section of the same course at the same time, was a graduate of a French university and as such was at home with the legalistic method. While we were studying the Arab League, I was concerned with why the headquarters of the League was in Cairo and was then moved to Tunis. He was more concerned with the context of Article 1 of the Charter

of the League which specifies that the headquarters of the League is located in Cairo. My colleague was more concerned with memory work, while I was concerned with the analyses of a political phenomena. I also found out that my colleague was regularly comparing the Arab League with the United Nations considering that the League predated the United Nations and had borrowed its concepts from those of the League of Nations.

4. The student body:

Students at the high school level in the Arab world are divided into those students who pursue a science curriculum, and those who pursue a humanities curriculum. At the end of their high school years they are required to take a government examination "the secondary school examination", also called the baccalaureate, and based on the score they achieve on the said examination they are assigned the college they could enroll in. This provides a dual selection system, one based on the early division between science and humanities, and the second the secondary school examination standing system.

Political science in the Arab world draws its students from high school students who have completed the humanities program, and the score level requirement is one of the lowest. Some of the universities on the other hand, accept only students with a science track since political science

is housed in the faculty of economics and commerce, and that faculty does not accept humanities track students. Both systems rely on unrealistic expectations since political science now utilizes both strong math and the humanities, yet high school science track students only take math . Many universities have been forced to change their guidelines, and some provide remedial courses to bridge the gap.

This system does not insure that the "bright kids" study political science, or that they study political science out of a commitment to the discipline.

This problem is compounded by the political constraints which exist in their countries and which limit the political socialization of the student. The political knowledge and experience of the students is as a result lower than what is necessary for a degree in political science.

Another question which is a perennial one, is what do you do with a political science degree in the Arab world. The nature of the political systems in the Arab world leads them to reserve the senior government positions, and particularly the ministry of foreign affairs positions to the political cadres of the regime and sons of specific families. In other words, state positions are filled by a closed not an open system of recruitment.

Still another factor is the requirement that the Arabic language be used for instruction at all universities teaching political science, and students hardly ever qualify beyond

the level of second grade in a foreign language which is normally the English language. This limits the ability of the student to acquire the necessary additional knowledge and sophistication which comes from reading the important books in the field and the periodicals. There is a movement to translate foreign books into Arabic but it is a time consuming effort and by the time the book is finally translated and is in the hands of the students it is often outdated. The same applies to the periodicals. Kuwait University has started a movement to translate periodical articles on a regular basis for the benefit of students of Arab universities. A bigger casualty of all this is that members of the faculty who are involved in the translation activity have little time to do basic research.

There is definitely a shortage of textbooks and reference materials in Arabic. It is interesting to note that faculty normally translate the books they studied during their student days abroad. Given the variety of countries they studied in, students use American, British, French, and German books translated into Arabic. In every case the translator has to find an Arabic word for that special scientific expression and he normally follows that with the word or expression, as is, in the language he is translating from. The poor student finds that apart from Arabic he should be versed in so many additional languages if he is to fully understand the different books he is required to read.

It is no secret that those students end with a feeling of total loss.

The lack of available reference materials in Arabic coupled with the political constraints of the different political systems they live under, forces students required to do research to limit themselves to library research regardless of how inadequate it may be. Field research seems so much out of the reach of the student. This limits the possibility of teaching students the new and innovative research methods in political science, and research papers tend to repeat what others have done previously and reported. I noticed that this leads students to accept the philosophical interpretations provided by faculty in Arabic language textbooks and periodicals without any attempt on their part to question these interpretations.

Conclusion:

The problems I have discussed in this paper seem nonsurmountable. I do not believe so, and for a number of reasons. First of all the faculty in the Arab world are beginning to sense the problem and want to see it resolved. Second there is pressure coming from the faculty to excel when they compare themselves with faculty of other universities in the same country. This competition is forcing faculty to publish and to develop innovative methods in teaching and research. But what is more important is that

this competition in the Arab world is not limited to the faculty of the same university or faculties of universities in the same country, as competition has spread to include faculties of all Arab universities. The competition is spreading across national boundaries and is gradually becoming a matter of national pride. Saudi faculty do not want Kuwaiti, Egyptian, Jordanian, etc.. faculty to forge ahead of them in the area of teaching and research, and the same can be said of the other faculties.

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